RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH RUTH ANNE KOENICK

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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Molly Graham: This begins interview with Ruth Anne Koenick. Am I saying that properly?

Ruth Anne Koenick: You've got it, yes.

MG: This begins an interview with Ruth Anne Koenick. The interview is taking place on March 18th, 2015. We are on 3 Bartlett Street in New Brunswick, New Jersey. We always start at the beginning with where and when you were born.

RK: I was born on December 8th, 1949, Garfield Hospital in Washington, D.C. It's no longer there. My parents, at that point, lived in Chevy Chase, Maryland. There really weren't any hospitals out in the suburbs, so I was born at Garfield Hospital. I'm the youngest of four children. I weighed in at nine pounds, twelve ounces. [laughter] When my mother took me home, I weighed nine-fourteen, so I was the only baby in the nursery to gain weight, she used to tell me.

MG: Can you tell us a little bit of your family history, starting on your father's side?

RK: My father was born in Shatsk, Russia. His father and two siblings came here before the start of World War I and the [Russian] Revolution and left my grandmother, my Aunt Frances, who was the oldest at that point, and three younger brothers in Shatsk--it was near Minsk, not far from Minsk--and had intended to spend a couple years, send money back.

Well, the revolution got in the way and the First World War got in the way. By the time that was over, my grandmother had passed away, and my Aunt Frances was taking care of her three little brothers. At some point, I think it was 1920 or '21, she got word that money had been left for them through the Hebrew Immigration and Assistance, HIAS, in Warsaw, I think. Somehow, she found how to get her three brothers and herself to Warsaw to get this money.

Kind of a sidebar of this is that in the Jewish religion, you say Kaddish for your mother or father for a year [after they die], and they weren't quite over with that. My Aunt Frances used to say so what they did is they went to the rabbi, they asked the rabbi, and the rabbi said, "It's your mother. You stay." The story--from my aunt who lived through this and my father--was that had they left then, they would've gone to a train station that had been overrun by the Red Army, and we wouldn't be having this conversation. They waited until they finished the appropriate time and went to a different station and got here. They came on the, I always called it, the good ship *Aquitania* and landed in Ellis Island on Yom Kippur. My grandfather met them and took them to Washington, D.C, where he had settled.

MG: How did he end up in Washington, D.C.?

RK: Well, he started in New York. He was a tailor. The people that he could find work with were people that he didn't particularly want to work with, and I think that there were other family who had moved on to Washington, D.C. My Aunt Esther was there; she had married. There were other family friends. They went to Washington, D.C, and he opened a tailor shop.

MG: What was your father's life like there?

RK: In Washington, D.C? I'll go back to Shatsk. He was starving. He'd had typhoid, which is what my grandmother died from. My aunt sent him out to another village, because they were going to feed him there, sent him to another village to teach the younger kids. He was eleven or twelve at the time, and he would come home every weekend.

He was a pretty scrawny, sick kid when he got to D.C., because they didn't have much food. We always said he was a hippy before there were hippies. He liked to do fun things, and he wasn't particularly responsible until he got married. He did some crazy things with friends, crazy like driving in a Model T that didn't have brakes, you know, that kind of craziness, doing just fun things, and that's pretty much how he was. He had a great group of friends. He didn't really work. He went to school, but I think he stopped in the eighth grade because he was already fifteen or sixteen and scrawny.

His life was really filled around the Jewish community that was kind of burgeoning in Washington, D.C. I haven't thought about this in a very long time. It was growing in Washington, D.C. It was really a thriving Jewish community, and that was his connection there.

MG: What neighborhood was that, or where in D.C. would this have been?

RK: 16th [Street] and something. I can't remember. It was kind of up Georgia Avenue towards Maryland, but it was still in D.C. My uncle, who married my Aunt Esther, had a liquor store there. My father managed the liquor store [and] won all sorts of awards. I could find out where it is, but I don't know off the top of my head. I remember going there as a young child.

I know that the first night they were in this country, I actually know who they stayed with, I can't remember exactly where it is, but I have it written down at home, with friends, the Beckers. I happen to have their piano in my house. When Sarah Becker, who was a piano teacher, passed away, I got her piano. There's still that connection from when my father first came to this country.

He had lots of nieces and nephews, mostly nephews at that point, and he had siblings. They used to talk about having only one pair of good pants, and they would share it, whoever had a date, but my Uncle Stanley was about five or six inches shorter than him. [laughter] They did silly things. They did things that adolescents and people do who aren't tied down to any particular relationship or something or a job.

MG: How old was he when he first came over?

RK: He was about fourteen or fifteen.

MG: What about the family history on your mother's side?

RK: My mother was born in Watertown, South Dakota. My grandparents I think were from Poland. They both came over to this country when they were about four years old, not together, but four years old. There was a Jewish trend in some people who were kind of like the people

who rode around the country and sold things, and they moved to Minneapolis. Then, my grandfather's family moved, actually, I do have this all written down at home, they moved to Iowa and then to South Dakota. They lived near the Red River, and I think the Red River used to overflow, I remember being told that. The Indians used to come and take what they wanted is what they always said. I don't know how true any of this is. For whatever reason, my grandmother's family moved there as well, and [my grandmother] married my grandfather. They raised thirteen children, because in those days that's what you did, you had a lot of children.

My mother was the oldest girl, the second oldest. When she graduated from high school, she wanted to be a nurse, and she was told she couldn't be a nurse, because her feet were too flat, you know, really ridiculous things. She went to live with her grandmother in Minneapolis. On a dare, she took a civil service kind of test, and she moved to Washington, D.C. to work for the New Deal, she always said, and became a secretary in the Department of Agriculture. [She] moved into a boarding house for Jewish women, and that's how she got to Washington, D.C. A number of her siblings followed. The girls all followed; the boys stayed out west. Many of them lived with us when I was growing up [and] stayed with us until they got married. Some of them married at our house. All except for two of the girls moved east with my mother.

MG: Your parents met in D.C.

RK: They met in D.C.

MG: Do you know how they met?

RK: I do. They [met through] a "matchmaker". My father was going out with someone. I'll tell you this is the Yiddish name, Shlemchala Goldenburg. I have no idea what his English name was, but Shlemchala said, "You have to meet Adeline." I think he was going out with somebody in the boarding house and said, "You need to meet Adeline." That's my mother. He was supposed to go to his nephew's bar mitzvah. They all agreed on this, so this isn't just the oral history [is] not really accurate. He had a date with this other woman, who I know her name as well. For lack of a better term, he made my uncle, the one who was a little shorter, take her to the bar mitzvah, so he could take my mother. [laughter] It was love. It was a blind date.

MG: How did it work out with your uncle?

RK: My uncle married somebody else. He married my Aunt Rose. They've all passed away by now.

MG: Your parents came back to Minnesota to have the wedding.

RK: They were married at my grandmother's house in Minnesota. My Aunt Esther and Sarah Becker and maybe my Aunt Frances went along with my father. We all were sure my father would be late, because he was late to everything, but he actually got there almost on time for the wedding. They were married there. Then, the first night they were going to Great Falls, and the first night my aunt and her friend Sarah went along with them. [laughter] My mother should

have taken that as a sign of the beginning that there was going to be a close relationship with her in-laws, and in fact there was. There was a very close relationship.

Then, they came back to Washington, D.C. and settled in Washington, D.C. My mother went back to work. She was making more than my father. She had just taken a depression-era cut, [a] ten percent or fifteen percent cut. Then, she got pregnant with my brother and went back to work, because my father was working but not making as much [as her]. I think she was making something like twenty-five dollars a week. Then, in the spring of 1942, they moved out to the suburbs, out to Chevy Chase, Maryland, which is the first house they owned there.

MG: What do you know about the work your mother was doing with the Department of Agriculture?

RK: She was a secretary. That's all I know.

MG: What about living through the depression did they tell you about?

RK: I can remember my mother talking about how hard it was to get things, but she had a job. This was a good thing. I also remember her talking about going, this is before World War II, going to buy shoes. She said she never bought more than one pair of shoes, because you just didn't go into a store and buy more than one pair of shoes. She remembered buying more than one pair of shoes, and it was such a treat for her. Then, a couple of days later, they started the rationing of leather and stuff. I don't remember a lot about them talking about the depression. That's about it.

MG: Remind me what your father was doing for work.

RK: My father, in the early days, worked for my uncle managing his liquor store, which was on Georgia Avenue. It was called Eig's Liquor, E-I-G's Liquor. He managed it, and there's lots of awards he won for the presentation of things in the store. We have lots of pictures of things that he won. He did that. I was a little girl when he and a brother-in-law went into business in the laundromat business. He did that until he retired.

MG: How did they spend the war years?

RK: Well, they lived in Chevy Chase. I think there are still lots of whatever you call the things that they got, ration coupons. I don't have them. They had children is what they did. My brother was born in '40, my sister in '43, my other sister in '45, and I'm '49.

MG: What do you remember about growing up in the D.C. suburbs?

RK: Well, I will tell you something. Everybody in my family has blue eyes but me. Everybody who married into my family has blue eyes. My parents have blue eyes. One day, I must have been having some kind of snit, as I was won't to do then and still do, and said I must be adopted and why didn't they just tell me the truth. My father told me a story; he would tell me I wasn't adopted. When World War II finished, all the kind of information was coming out about what

really had happened to the Jews in Europe. Their desire was to have more children, as many people then wanted to have more children, to kind of repopulate the Jewish population, and I was the result of that. My mother had one or two miscarriages trying to have more children. They were already in their forties by then. I was that.

I remember a lot of my aunts and uncles lived within walking distance, very much like the *shtetl* my father grew up in. My cousins lived next door. We had cousins' club meetings. We all got together. We did a lot of things with family. My parents really taught me that family, community and religion are the three most important things and that they're all very intertwined. My life revolved around that way.

My mother was the professional volunteer. I remember she volunteered for just about everything when she stopped working. I remember she was a Red Cross volunteer. She would put on her Red Cross uniform and little hat, and we would drive to the Red Cross building that wasn't that far. She'd get a station wagon. I was the youngest, so I usually went along with her. We would go to what was then called the Old Soldiers' Home and pick up veterans and take them to the doctor or picnics or out to Great Falls for the afternoon. She always made sure she had one of us with her when she volunteered, because it was role modeling that she did for us in volunteerism.

I had a great childhood. I came from a warm and nurturing family. Maybe my siblings weren't so, but my parents were very warm and nurturing. My father, and I've told this story before, my father one day was going to take us to the beach, and we weren't going swimming. It was a beach not far from where I grew up. He wanted us to a see a sign that said, "No Jews, dogs or niggers." He taught me about that. He lived through the pogroms. He lived through a lot of stuff. He really taught me that when one of us is discriminated against, all of us are. A lot of my social activism comes from my father. I had a great growing up. I walked to elementary school. We came home for lunch; we walked home for lunch. My friends, we all walked together. It was great.

MG: Were you able to find another Jewish community to move into?

RK: When?

MG: When you moved to Chevy Chase.

RK: Oh, yes. My parents were founding members of a local synagogue, and all my cousins, everybody was living there, all of my family, I mean, the extended family. Yes, there was a growing Jewish community there. There were areas in Chevy Chase that we couldn't buy in, so the Jews created their own areas.

MG: In addition to not being allowed access to certain public places, what other experiences of discrimination did you have?

RK: More hearing about than actually feeling discriminated as Jewish. I did have, I was actually telling one of the students this the other day, they were talking about middle school, I was talking about junior high school and saying that I can remember somebody saying to me,

"Let the Jew pass." I don't remember much discrimination. Maybe it's because most of my friends were Jewish, but I don't remember much about that. I remember hearing about quotas certain colleges had and places you couldn't buy and country clubs you couldn't join and stuff, but I didn't feel discriminated against except by what I heard.

Jessica Friedman: Do you mind if I ask a question?

MG: Oh, yes, go ahead.

JF: Did you hear a lot about Holocaust survivors, or were they around?

RK: Yes, I had a number of friends whose parents were Holocaust survivors. Well, the last one that I really knew just passed away. Yes, we knew where they were born. I'm friends with people who were born in a displaced persons camp afterwards, friends whose parents had numbers on them, but nobody talked much about it. It was there. You didn't really talk about it.

MG: Did that change later on in life? There seemed to be a period in time in the 1990s, where there was an increased focus on interviewing and preserving Holocaust survivor testimonies.

RK: I think what has happened now is there are people who are second and third generation, and there are groups for second and third generations, you know, second generation whose parents were survivors, third generation who are their children, and there has been a desire among people to really talk about it, to think about it and to do histories of it because they're all dying by now. There are so many people in the world who are in leadership and influential positions, as well as others, who think the Holocaust never happened, you know, and Jews were responsible for 9/11, all of this craziness, in my opinion. I think there's a real desire to get that oral history down, and I think it started in the '90s and trying to push people to do that.

We just--was it this past year or the year before--celebrated a bar mitzvah in our synagogue, that I'm co-president of, of someone who was a Holocaust survivor and was sent to a camp when he should have had his bar mitzvah. Afterwards, he wouldn't have one. They nagged him and nagged him and nagged him, his family did. Finally, he said, "Do what you want," and it was lovely. He was actually at some Holocaust remembrance thing in D.C. Rush Holt, who was his representative, invited him to come to this. Rush Holt came to the bar mitzvah. It was really lovely. He's a bit on the old side, and to get his story, his family really had to push him to talk about it.

MG: I was curious if living in proximity to the nation's capital might have shaped your family's patriotism or feelings about the country.

RK: Oh, that's interesting. Well, *The Washington Post* was our local newspaper. We went to concerts downtown in the Watergate, not the Watergate that you all know about. It was the place by where the Watergate big buildings are now. It was a platform where the National Symphony [Orchestra] used to play in the summer. I think my parents were very patriotic, not in a showy way, but they felt a very strong connection to the liberties that they had.

I teach, and I always tell my students, "How many of you are voting?" I'm really on their case about voting and what a joy it is to be able to vote and what a freedom it is. I get on my high horse about this. I think they did. I think that being so close, when I was in elementary school, field trips were down to all the D.C. stuff, but it felt like my backyard. I can remember on the Fourth of July, if we went up on the deck on the second floor of the house I grew up in, you could see the fireworks from downtown and you could hear when the cannons went off when the National Symphony played the *1812 Overture*. It was a connection that I don't know how to describe it, but it was my backyard as far as I was concerned. I had never lived any place else until I was in my twenties.

MG: I was curious if your family ever traveled back to South Dakota.

RK: Yes, I was six months old. [laughter] That's all I know about it. I was six months old. Then, my grandmother and my grandfather moved east. My grandfather was in a wheelchair, and so they moved east because their daughters had all moved east. In those days, it was the daughter's obligation, out of love, but it was always the daughter's obligation to take care of the parents. They moved east when I was a little girl, so, no, they didn't go back.

MG: Can you tell us a little bit about your experiences in school, favorite subjects, teachers, memories?

RK: Starting when?

MG: As early as you can go.

RK: Well, my kindergarten teacher was Mrs. Wake, and I loved her. She always was the "Old Woman who Lived in a Shoe" for Halloween. She was a sweet, sweet woman, and I have pictures of all of us dressed up with Mrs. Wake.

Then, elementary school was around the corner. My sister was one of the patrols. She was mean to me. [laughter] I just remembered being very comfortable in school. I was not the smartest of the smart, and I was pretty mouthy. I remember getting a C in "Citizenship," because I was mouthy. I'm not a particularly book smart person. I'm much more politically astute about how things work. I was a patrol. My elementary school was just around the corner. It was a couple of blocks away, and it was the one we all went to. We were very comfortable there, because my siblings had gone before me. I don't remember much about it. We made a mosaic that hung, it probably still hangs, in the library of the transcontinental railroad and meeting in the middle with a golden spike. That came out of my class. It was just the neighborhood school. That's where we voted. I never voted there, but that's where they voted. That's where they had bake sales and PTA [Parent Teacher Association]. The playground outside was where we all played. It's kind of like going back in the '50s; that's when I grew up there.

In junior high school, I made a very good friend. In fact, her son and my son met at camp years later and became very good friends. [laughter] It wasn't a camp that his mother nor I had gone to, we'd gone to a different camp, but Lisa and I were really good friends. We lost track of each

other, went to different high schools. I didn't love junior high school so much. I never felt like I really fit in there.

I fit in much better in high school. I liked high school, but I wasn't that smart. Well, that's not true. I was lazy. I was very, very lazy and didn't care about school so much, but I had fun. We could leave during lunch, and my friend Nancy Nadel and I would often go get ice cream sundaes for lunch. We could just do pretty much [whatever we wanted]. When I had to be picked up to go to the doctor, you just left. Your mother sent in a note, and you walked out. It wasn't the way it is now where somebody has to come in and sign you out and show ID and pledge to not hurt you or whatever it is. It really was a very different world then. I graduated high school, Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School, in 1967. It was, at that point, there were a lot of senators and representatives and international people who went to that high school. It was before they started sending their kids to private schools.

The Humphreys and the McGoverns lived near us, and I was friends with Terry McGovern for years. I just saw her father on something on TV, he's since I think passed away, but I was watching something that showed him talking on TV. It was a very nice neighborhood, really a sense of community. There was a little strip mall shopping center that had a grocery store in it that my uncle owned, a cleaners, a five-and-dime, a deli, a little dress shop about the size of this room, a hairdresser, a barber shop, a bakery and a drug store. Everybody knew everyone, and it was a very nice, small-town community before it got bigger. [Editor's Note: Democrat Hubert Humphrey (1911-1978) served in the U.S. Senate from 1949 to 1964, as vice president in the administration of Lyndon B. Johnson from 1965 to 1969, and in the Senate again from 1971 to 1978. George McGovern (1922-2012) was a Democratic Party politician who served in the U.S. Senate from 1963 to 1981. Humphrey and McGovern each mounted unsuccessful presidential campaigns against Richard Nixon in 1968 and 1972, respectively. In 1994, McGovern's daughter Theresa "Terry" McGovern died at the age of forty-five from hypothermia caused by being intoxicated and falling asleep outside in the cold.]

MG: You might have been a little bit young, but do you remember overhearing conversations in your household or seeing anything on television about the threat of Communism and the Red Scare that was taking place during the 1950s?

RK: No, I don't really remember that.

MG: You were a teenager when I wish I was a teenager, during the birth of rock and roll, and the 1960s just seemed like an exciting time.

RK: Yes.

MG: Did you get to participate in any of that?

RK: Yes. I'm trying to figure out where I want to start with this. I was very much involved in the anti-war movement. I hitchhiked to Woodstock with my best friend Bonnie Rosenthal. We did a lot of wild, crazy stuff then. It was a fun time. It was a little crazy. It was a lot crazy. It

was a lot wild. I wasn't really that way in high school; I just didn't care about school very much. I didn't really care if I went to college.

I would not have been allowed not to go to college. I was futzing around with my applications. Bonnie's mother, who was Ethel Rosenthal, was a very formidable woman, and she, as we used to say then, read me the riot act. I went home and applied to all these schools, none of which were going to accept me, because I had lousy SATs and lousy grades. I applied to the University of Maryland, which was twenty minutes away, and they accepted me provisionally. I had to go to summer school, and I had to get I think two C's in what was then "Freshman English," you all would call it "Expos" ["Expository Writing"], people would call it "Expos," students here, not you all, and some social science. Then, in the afternoon, we were supposed to go to all these reading and study skill stuff. Nancy, the one I used to get ice cream with, also was accepted provisionally, and so we would go to take our classes and we blew off all the afternoon stuff. It wasn't hard. Once I worked, it wasn't hard.

Obviously, I was admitted to the University of Maryland in College Park. I didn't want to move into the resident halls. My parents said, "If you're going to go this close, you're going to be like your siblings, you're going to live on campus," and they bribed me so that I would actually move on to campus. That was really the start of a very different life for me. Because I was on campus, that's how I got active in the anti-war movement. That's where I met my husband. It was just a fun time.

MG: Can you tell us about any of it, the demonstrations? I am very curious about Woodstock.

RK: [laughter] Well, the demonstrations were really interesting. I still actually have a lot of stuff that I saved from then. Probably the most interesting, probably the most scary was when I got arrested on Dupont Circle in D.C. and found myself in jail. My brother, who's a lawyer working for the head of the folks who were demonstrating for their legal rights, got word that I was in jail. I was in jail with somebody who's well known, and I can't think of what her name is. Essentially, what they were doing, when you go to jail, when you get arrested, bail is set for you. Even if it's a million dollars, bail is set for you. What they were doing is not setting bail. They did that because everybody was paying the ten percent and being out on the street again. They stopped allowing to set bail. My brother and Phil Hirschkop, who was the head of the legal group, filed a class-action suit on my behalf to stop them from not setting bail anymore. I remember, once I got closer to the courtroom, seeing my brother and him saying, "I called Mommy and Daddy to let them know this is going to be a big thing and that you're okay." I think I was let out, my brother taking responsibility for me. Actually, I have a copy of some of it here. It was in the Congressional register. That was kind of exciting. [laughter]

I continued to demonstrate. It was very much a part of who I am. I didn't believe in the Vietnam War then. I don't believe in it now. Going back, would I do things differently? Probably not. It was very much an interesting [time]. I learned a lot. One of the things I learned, and actually a student made this into a poster for me, I got very tired of making coffee and not policy. Women were not in the policy roles in the anti-war movement. It was all the boys. I got really tired of men making those decisions.

My budding feminism took over and said that if anything was going to change for women, I had to be involved in it. I got very involved in kind of what was probably called second wave feminism and working towards a number of things. I did abortion counseling before *Roe v. Wade*. We shared one of those big walk-in coat closets, and at the student union at Maryland, draft counseling was in the back and abortion counseling was in the front. I did that for a while. I started what's often credited as the first rape crisis center on a college campus at the University of Maryland forty-some years ago. I co-founded it with two other women. My love became working on issues of violence against women. No matter how that was, it had to be something that had to do with women.

MG: Was the seed for that what you were just talking about in the demonstrations?

RK: Yes. It was definitely the seed for that. There was a group called the Democratic Radical Union of Maryland, I can't believe I remember that all these years later, and it would say, "End war now. End racism," end this and then down on the bottom would be something about women. I had this "Ah ha" moment, "What's going on here?" It really was an "Ah ha" moment for me, that it wasn't right. A lot of the anti-rape movement really had its beginnings in second wave feminism. Some of it had its beginnings in the Civil War and afterwards in the way that African American men were being hanged if they looked at a white woman and the belief that all African American men were going to rape. It was that kind of sense for that time, but in second wave feminism, it was really if we don't do something for ourselves, no one is going to do it. I got really involved in that piece of it.

JF: I have a quick question. When *Roe v. Wade* came out in 1973, were you excited about the trial? Were you watching it?

RK: I remember being very excited about it, but I couldn't tell you anything more than that. I don't remember anything more than that.

MG: I am curious about the women you were counseling in the abortion clinic. What were there stories, or is there anybody that stands out to you?

RK: I just don't remember. The one that stands out to me is somebody I saw more than once. I knew that access to birth control [was limited]. The birth control pill had been legalized in this country in May of 1960, but there wasn't great access. People didn't talk about these things. Yes, you could get birth control at the health center, but it wasn't really open. It was really a hard time to get that access to that kind of [birth control]. People used condoms maybe, and nobody really had diaphragms in those days. If they did, they were married, and that's how you got a prescription for it. It was really hard to get good reliable birth control, even though it was ten years after the birth control pill had been legalized in this country. It just was not something people talked about. I don't remember much about watching it.

I've watched things, there's a really fascinating movie called *The Pill*, and it's a PBS film about the development of the birth control pill, that I love. I show it in any class I can get away with showing it, getting away meaning that there's a topic that I can talk about. It's a wonderful movie, because it really looks at Margaret Sanger, the mother of birth control, and what her

mother's life was like and her life was like. She has a wonderful quote that I have kind of lived by, that, "Sometimes in order to change the law, you have to break it," and I think sometimes you do.

MG: I feel like I have a million questions. [laughter]

RK: I'll answer it. [laughter] This is fine. This is actually kind of fun. [laughter] The first concert I went to was the Beatles. There's a lot of fun things in that time period that I haven't thought about for a very long time. I will tell you that Bonnie, my best friend Bonnie Rosenthal, Nancy Nadel, and the other one of us, who was Marilyn Lipskind, we all just got together this fall to celebrate our sixty-fifth birthday. I was the only one that wasn't sixty-five at the time; I had another month. We went to see [the Broadway musical] *Kinky Boots*, and we went out to eat and had a fabulous time. We stay in touch with each other.

MG: Were there any memories from this time period we are talking about that you guys rehashed?

RK: Well, two out of four of us are divorced, so we didn't talk about some of those things. We talked about our kids. We talked about where we are in life and what we're doing. I actually hadn't seen Bonnie or Marilyn in [years]. I hadn't seen Bonnie in maybe thirty years. She Googled me on my sixtieth birthday and found me. She had moved to California. We had very different lives. It was some birthday she Googled me on and found me, so we've reconnected. Marilyn and I did as well. I hadn't seen Nancy probably since the middle of college. We all think we look alike, so it was really kind of nice. [laughter] Bonnie and I had already rehashed a lot of this stuff, because when I had gone to California to visit my son when he lived in California, I would go visit her as well.

MG: This is an aside and may not make sense as it comes out, but I think it is great that you are Google-able. There is something in retaining your name, your last name, that allows us to see the work you have done, the things you have published, and that might have been more difficult had you changed your name.

RK: Had I become Ruth Anne Herman.

MG: Yes.

RK: Yes, it probably would have been.

MG: Getting back to this time period, I am curious if you could just describe yourself, what you looked like. If we had a picture of you from 1967, what would we see?

RK: Well, my hair was long and straight, a little bit shorter than yours, and it was blonde. I used to dye my hair all the time. Now, it's red. It's not as dyeable. In those days, I did it at home, and I dyed my hair a lot. I look very much like my daughter and my granddaughter. I just got a text from my son telling me, "Boy, Kenzie really is looking more like you every day." She's almost seven. I was a lot thinner than I am now and thought I probably knew more than I think I know

now. I was pretty conservative in my dress until I got involved in the anti-war movement. I spent a summer or two in Atlantic City working, Bonnie and I did. It was really at the edge of the change in getting bell bottoms and wild stuff, you know, the things you see in movies now.

MG: When and where did you see the Beatles?

RK: I was in Washington, D.C. someplace. I don't remember when it was. I was in either junior high or high school.

MG: What was that like?

RK: Wild, wild. All I can say is wild. [laughter] Someplace on the East Coast, somebody had gotten tickets, and I got one of them.

JF: How did your parents feel about you going to Woodstock and all these concerts?

RK: Well, who knew what Woodstock was when we left? [laughter] I never told them that I hitchhiked with Bonnie. "We have a ride." Bonnie's boyfriend was working in the Catskills as a waiter, and so we were going to see Michael. Then, I had some other friends who were going to be in New York City for a while. I must have called and asked for some more money. They didn't know how I got into New York and how I got back. It's amazing that I'm still alive, actually. I would have a fit if my children had done this.

I really was raised on the knees of people who have lived through a lot and believe very strongly in advocating for what you believed in was right. I was the baby in the family, so I could get away with a whole lot of things my older siblings couldn't. [Editor's Note: The Woodstock music festival occurred in Bethel, New York from August 15 to August 18, 1969.]

MG: What about the civil rights movement? What did you witness about that, or did you participate in any demonstrations?

RK: My brother was actually very involved in [it]. He lived in Washington, D.C. at the time, and I remember my father going down to Washington, D.C. to be part of a demonstration. I was still a little young in the early '60s. My activism really didn't start until the late '60s and early '70s. I remember my mother being very upset because she thought he was in danger, but he just wanted to witness everything and wanted be part of everything because we believed very strongly in that. I always am amazed at people who want to reclaim certain language and certain words now. I would've gotten in trouble if I had said those words when I was younger, because you didn't say things that were degrading about people. You just didn't do that.

MG: Was your brother traveling to the South to support the movements down there?

RK: No, he was married by that point. He married in the early to mid '60s, married young, as did I.

MG: I am curious about the program you chose to study at the University of Maryland and getting into criminology.

RK: Well, I started in education. [laughter] I switched to journalism. I hated education, hated it. It was early childhood, hated it, hated it. Then, I switched to journalism, which Bonnie and I thought would be interesting. Then, I switched because it required a language requirement. [laughter] I had to take economics, and it was not my skill set.

I switched to criminology, because I took a course and I just fell in [love], not fell in love like emotional love, but I thought it was very interesting. I liked the teacher. He became my advisor. I liked sociology. I became good friends, as friendly as you are with teacher and faculty, or as friendly as you should be with teacher and faculty, with a sociology teacher, and criminology was a subset of sociology. I just liked it. They did away with the language requirement after I had failed it once. They didn't have all those other kinds of requirements. It wasn't hard for me. That's how I got there. It wasn't through any other reason, that I was going to go off and go save the world or work at a prison. It wasn't anything like that. It was just what the requirements were.

MG: Were you able to tie some of the things you were learning in class with what you were seeing in the demonstrations?

RK: Yes, I think so. Actually, I took a course that we made up. You could take these general education courses. You could make up a course. The one that I took, and he was a sociology grad student, he taught the "History of ROTC." It was a made-up course. I got an "A" in it. Abe Lavender taught it. I really haven't thought about it in a very long time. We could make up these kind of gen ed courses. It was just the beginning of that movement to design some of your own curriculum.

It was in those days also when finals were in June. I can remember, it must have been when Bobby Kennedy was at the primary in California, I can remember seeing that, and when Martin Luther King was killed and all of the things that happened at a time when we were in college. Then, all the demonstrations I think really started to move graduation back, so students wouldn't be there during all the prime demonstration times. When I started college, you started and you went to the third week in December. You had a break, and then you came back and took your finals. Then, you had a semester break, and then you finished taking your finals in June. [Editor's Note: Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated on April 4, 1968 in Memphis, Tennessee. Robert Kennedy was shot on June 5, 1968 in Los Angeles, California and died the next day.]

MG: One thing that just popped into my head is it seemed like even without the Internet and cell phones, students and individuals were able to mobilize so quickly for demonstrations, and I was wondering how that network worked.

RK: Wow, I don't remember how. [laughter] We called each other. In my dorm, there [were] payphones in the basement, and you could call in on phones. I might say that it was the smell of gas in the air from trying to get them to stop demonstrating, but I don't remember how we

communicated with each other. Signs went up all over campus, I do know that. Once you got into a kind of culture of this, there were just ways that we did this. I don't remember how.

MG: How quickly after an incident like an assassination would students organize?

RK: Fairly quickly. I just don't remember.

MG: I want to talk a little bit more about criminology. I imagine it has changed quite a bit.

RK: I imagine. I have no idea. I have absolutely no idea. I think I still get stuff from the University of Maryland from my department, but it's not called that anymore. Now, it's [the College of] Behavioral [and Social Sciences]. I don't feel connected to it. I just read it, and it's interesting. I imagine it has. It's not what I do anymore.

The one thing I would say, besides my activism and stuff in college, was I became an RA [resident advisor], and it really headed me in the student affairs direction. I only became an RA because they were changing the way they were staffing. In those days, you only had graduate people serving in the residence halls and no undergraduates, and they were changing it. They were going to take my room, which I had been in for three years. It sounds really stupid all these years [later]. It was a primo room. It was a corner room, so it had two windows in it and [there was] no air conditioning in those days. I went storming down to my house mother, yelling and screaming about it, "You can't take my room," all that. She said, "Ruth Anne, you want your room, apply for the job," and I applied for the job and they hired me. That's really how I got involved with student affairs; I became an RA.

MG: Was that before you founded the rape crisis center on campus?

RK: It was around the same time.

MG: Because I imagine that female students were coming to you with these kind of complaints of assault.

RK: Once we started this, it was Chris Courtois, Debbie Watts, who has since passed away, and I, once we really started it, people started coming in droves to say, "It happened to me last year." I was feeling really overwhelmed by it, because nobody had ever really talked about this. I had a student on my floor who had been abducted and raped, and I didn't know what to do. I mean, I was told what I had to do. Nobody else knew anything, and so we quickly became experts in this and people felt like they could come to us. So much of what I still do today really came from those early survivors from forty-some years ago. I think students really came out and looked for somebody who they could tell their story to but wasn't going to judge them.

MG: Sort of starting and founding a center or organization is really a learning process, so I am just curious how you figured things out without having stood on the shoulders of something else.

RK: We made a lot of mistakes. We thought we knew more than we did. We didn't really realize what we didn't know, but there was nobody to tell us. The first really helpful book that

came out came out in 1974. We were already doing this for a couple of years by then. The counseling center at Maryland was very helpful to us. They helped us with training volunteers. The vice president for student affairs was really helpful to us. We just learned by the mistakes that we made. We didn't know a lot, so it was a learning process for us with nobody to really tell us what to do.

Chris went on and is now probably one of the--if not the--most respected writer and therapist and trainer in the country or maybe parts of the world on working with adult survivors of child sexual abuse. That's what she did her dissertation on. Debbie passed away a long time ago. I'm still in the trenches, still doing this stuff.

We learned by our mistakes. I still have all of the old training manuals and things we developed. They were run off on mimeograph machines, and people lent us their machines and their ink and stuff. It was a bizarre time.

MG: Were there any other models, or were you starting to see similar centers?

RK: Probably the first two that opened up in the country, one was in San Francisco and one was in D.C., the D.C. Rape Crisis Center. It was really not prevention work; it was really response work. Those two opened around the same time, I'm never sure which is the first and which is the second, but we are usually credited as being the first on a campus.

MG: Did you have a sense then that this was the kind of work you wanted to continue to do?

RK: No, I didn't. I wasn't quite sure. I knew I wanted to go into student affairs, and this is kind of non-traditional student affairs in those days. I quickly became knowledgeable, more knowledgeable than other people, and so it just seemed right to me. It felt right to me. It's what I've always done. My whole professional career has been on issues of violence against women and usually children involved in that as well. I fell into it. It was nothing more than falling into it.

MG: Did you feel any sense of responsibility after graduating to the center? It is sometimes tough to leave any job that you are kind of dedicated to.

RK: I stayed in touch with the head of the health center, Maggie Bridwell, actually almost until she died. We were all around Maryland. My husband was working there. We still hung out there. I went to graduate school partially at Maryland and finished up at GW [George Washington University]. I still have connections there. When I go to a conference next week, I'll go to the Maryland party. Very few connections are left, but we were still pretty well connected there.

JF: Did you ever have difficulties separating this work from your personal life?

RK: I would say no. When I use to run the rape crisis center or when I just was staff there for a while, if I got called out in the middle of the night, I would often come home and sit on the edge of the bed with one of my children and just kind of remember there was some innocence left in

the world. I don't see clients much anymore, but I would sometimes close my door and weep [and] probably sometimes ate too much chocolate. We found ways to take care of each other, the women who do this kind of work. Mary Taylor, who I've mentioned before, Mary and I, at one point, we were the only two in the rape crisis center. If she had a four o'clock call out but her husband wasn't home and she had a young child, I would take it for her. I could call her at three a.m. and say, "I just had a horrible case. I need to talk." That probably hasn't happened in twenty-five, thirty years, but it used to happen.

In separating from my home life, I'm a bit of crazy person when it comes to protecting children. I came home once from work, my husband was home with our son, who was probably about five or six at the time, and he couldn't find him. I freaked. I was sure my child had been abducted. That's my craziness in this, like, "How can you lose our child?" kind of response. He said, "I went door to door. Nobody answered." He was looking for him. I'm freaked out, and so I'm going door to door. He was at a neighbor's house. When Paul had checked the first time, they had a housekeeper and the housekeeper hadn't answered the door. It wasn't her fault; it was my husband's fault. He also lost him once at the beach. I'm crazy about watching my grandchildren, and I'm much more protective of children than other people are. It's just the work do. I'm probably more cautious about things than most people are. It has really kind of helped me frame the way that I see things.

Has it impacted my life? Absolutely. Do I have trouble separating? I could see a really horrible case right now and I could go home and I would think about it, but it wouldn't change what I'm going to do tonight. I've seen thousands of people and I still carry them in my heart, but I learned how to go on and do what I need to do.

MG: You said you met your husband during college.

RK: When I was in college, he was in grad school.

MG: Okay. How did you meet?

RK: I was going to be an RA. I was friends with two of the grad students in my building, and I was hanging out with them. They were checking people in in the summer, and I went over and sat with them. Paul was also checking people in, he worked in that complex, and that's how I met him. He was dating a friend of mine, but she was more eager to get married than he was and so they stopped seeing each other. Then, Paul and I started seeing each other, mostly when we were doing a search for the vice president for student affairs. He was the grad representative, and I was the undergraduate representative. That's how we met at Maryland.

MG: Can you tell us a little bit more about him, what he was doing at that point in his life, what he is like?

RK: I've been married almost forty-two years. He is one of the smartest people I know. He's book smart, not that politically smart. He's book smart. We make a good couple that way. He was born in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. He's the youngest of two children. He went to Gettysburg College, then he did some graduate work at Emory, didn't finish there, and then went to teach in

high school, the high school he graduated from, McCaskey High School. He got hired the day he got his draft notice, and this was 1963, '63 or '64. In those days, you could get a deferment for teaching. He was really glad he got his deferment. He taught for about five years, high school English and history, and then decided that he wanted to go back to school and came to the University of Maryland to work, eventually, on his Ph.D. and he was a student affairs person. He started with his master's and finished his doctorate there as well, and he worked for residence life, which so many people working their way through graduate school work for residence life. That's how I met him. He's a phenomenal gardener. He does all the cooking in our house. He's a phenomenal cook and gardener. He's a nice person. He's a much nicer person in some ways than I am. He's a nice person.

MG: You married about a year after you graduated from the University of Maryland.

RK: I graduated from Maryland, it should have been '71, it was in January of '72, and I was married a little over a year later.

MG: How did you spend your year between graduating and getting married?

RK: I took some graduate courses at Maryland and just hung out. My first job was supposed to be for the OEO, Office of Economic Opportunity, I think. I think that's what it was. I was going to do an evaluation of a program in Baltimore that did some kind of support for people of lower socioeconomic status, and I was going to start on January 2nd. Our president at that time, Richard Nixon, as of January 1st got rid of the department that I was supposed to work in, so I was unemployed. I hung out and took some graduate classes. That's really what I did.

MG: Did you then decide that is when you wanted to pursue a master's?

RK: It seemed like a good idea. [laughter] It wasn't a whole lot of thought that really went into this. It seemed like a good idea. I wasn't a great planner in that way. So I did. My parents said they'd pay for it, so it seemed like a reasonable thing. I was unemployed, and so I went to school. I knew I wanted to be in student affairs; that I knew. The RA experience had just [influenced that decision]. Then, all of my soon-to-be husband's friends, all of our friends, except for my friends from high school, were in student affairs, and so I just kind of fell into it.

MG: Jess, do you have other questions about her college experience or growing up that we might have skipped over?

JF: No, I think I am good right now.

MG: Is there anything that we have left out so far?

RK: Not that I can think of. You've been very thorough. [laughter]

JF: Actually, I do have one. Did any of your siblings go to college, or did all of them go to college?

RK: We would not have been allowed to not go to college. My brother has a law degree. My oldest sister has a master's degree. She was an art teacher. My younger, not younger than me, but number three has a bachelor's plus sixty. She was an elementary, kindergarten teacher. So, we all had to go. Mother went through high school, my father through eighth grade. We would never have been allowed to not go to college.

MG: Part of the focus of this project is to learn more about your work with rape crisis center and your work here at Rutgers, but we do not want to skip over special moments. I am curious about your wedding day and what you remember about that.

RK: Oh, yes, oh, my God. I wanted to be married in my parents' backyard. They had a beautiful backyard. I married somebody who wasn't Jewish, so I couldn't be married in the synagogue anyway. There were a number of my parents' friends who wouldn't come to our wedding, but I understood that. That's what they believed in and who they were. We were married in a very large tent in my parents' backyard.

The day of the wedding, it had been raining all week, and it got worse and worse and worse. Sometime early that morning, there was a loud boom, and a transformer blew. We had no electricity. The caterer was about to arrive, and we had no electricity. It was a mess. There were some riding stables not far from where we lived, and my father and people went down to the stables and got some straw to put down to try to soak up some of the water. I have pictures of my cousin David standing on a chair pushing up the tent, trying to get rid of the water on top. The band was a little nervous that they were going to get electrocuted. Everything was running late.

My next door neighbors, the Binons, they were French, and he was the head chef at the Mayflower Hotel in D.C. They had a beautiful rose garden that she tended to. She cut all of her roses and came over with baskets of roses because a bride should not walk on straw, so sweet. All of the roses got put down on the straw, because that's what a bride should walk on. My aunt, my Aunt Elsie, who was a milliner, her gift to all of her nieces was she made our veils. It was so cold, it was the end of May, and it was so cold because of the rain. You can hear the rain in the tape of our wedding. It was a mess. It was just a mess, but we got married.

Forty-two years later, we're still married. It was much less formal than some of the weddings are today. I think the caterer cost all of about 2,500 dollars. I have a beautiful silver bread knife, or challah knife, that she gave to us as a wedding present. The Binons, the head chef, I have a really beautiful silver chafing dish. I still use all of these things. I'm very old fashioned about some of this stuff, the china, crystal and silver, and I use them. It was an interesting day. It was an interesting day because of the rain, and it was just so cold. It was good. We went away a day or two later, came home. We didn't have any money. We were in graduate school. We had not a penny. We went camping for a while. We stayed in a hotel a couple of days, camped a little bit. It was what we could afford. None of these off to Italy or off to the islands; that wasn't happening.

MG: Remind me again what you pursued your master's in.

RK: Student affairs, college student development, it was called, or student affairs, college student personnel, but it was definitely student affairs.

MG: What was that experience like for you at graduate school? Were you starting to feel more focused with where you wanted to head in your career?

RK: Well, I took twelve credit hours at Maryland, and they were a lot of fun because I knew people there. Then, I applied to be admitted to the program at Maryland, but that was the year they were not accepting anyone because they had too many people who were ABD [all but dissertation]. It was an accreditation issue. They said apply next year, and I said, "No, I'm not waiting." I applied to GW, and I got accepted.

I didn't like it there, because I was a commuter. I commuted in from Maryland. My husband and I were living on campus in one of the residence halls he supervised. I came in. I parked at the Kennedy Center. I took the bus up to campus, and I just didn't fit in there. I liked some of the courses I took, but I was there for a year and a half and I feel no allegiance to GW. I feel a strong allegiance to the University of Maryland but nothing to GW.

MG: Do you think that would have been different if you had been staying on campus?

RK: It might have been. I had a slight allegiance to it, and then they admitted somebody to play basketball who was a convicted rapist and I wrote to them and said, "You're not getting a penny from me anymore," not that I gave them very much money.

MG: Who was that?

RK: I don't know. It was years and years ago.

MG: What was your first position after graduate school?

RK: [laughter] It wasn't much of a position. My husband and I had an agreement. He had finished his doctorate. I had finished my master's. Whoever got the first job is where we were going. He got the first job, and so we moved to Florida. He went to work at Eckerd College, and I couldn't find a job that I wanted. I hung out at the beach. I got pregnant. I worked for a month filling in, doing student activities work there, and I taught in the community college. I never really found a job for me, and then we moved up here.

MG: Let us take a break.

RK: I have no problems with talking more if you want to talk more.

MG: We will take a break, and then we will see where we want to head next.

RK: Okay, that's fine.

----------END OF INTERVIEW----------

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